

**“INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTION AS A RESPONSE TO STATE FAILURE:  
POST-COLD WAR TO POST-9/11”\***

**Walter C. Soderlund  
Department of Political Science  
University of Windsor  
Windsor, Ontario  
N9B 3P4**

**E-mail: [akajake@uwindsor.ca](mailto:akajake@uwindsor.ca)  
Phone: (519) 253-3000 ext. 2350  
Fax: (519) 973-7094**

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## Introduction

Ten humanitarian crises of the 1990s, some involving “failed” states and the rest involving “fragile” states, were studied with respect to determinants of international intervention (Soderlund and Briggs, in press). In chronological order these crises are: Liberia- 1990, Somalia- 1992, Sudan- 1992, Rwanda- 1994, Haiti- 1994, Burundi- 1996, Zaire- 1996, Sierra Leone- 1997, Angola- 1999, and East Timor- 1999. In addition to documenting the strength of the dependent variable (any international humanitarian intervention that might have occurred), five independent variables were examined: (1) seriousness of the crisis in terms of lives lost, refugees produced, and “spill-over” of conflict into other states; (2) perceived risks entailed in an intervention operation; (3) involvement of conventional security/economic interests on the part of potential intervening powers; (4) strength of the media “alert” to the crisis; and (5) media “evaluation” of the justification for and efficacy of an international intervention. Data for the latter two variables were derived from studies of prime time U.S. broadcast television news programs (ABC, CBS, and NBC) and the premier newspaper of record in the United States, *The New York Times*. Following some context-setting material, this paper will review the major findings of this research from the perspective of international intervention serving as a response to state failure. It will conclude with a reexamination of these findings in light of changes that followed the end of the post-Cold War period— both the system altering attacks on the United States of September 11, 2001, and the adoption by the international community of the “Responsibility to Protect” doctrine in 2005. Here the paper will assess the likelihood and efficacy of international intervention as a solution to contemporary instances of humanitarian crises likely to lead to state failure.

## The Concept of State “Failure”

William Zartman has identified “state collapse” as a relatively new phenomenon and develops the concept out of the experiences of post-colonial Africa. According to Zartman, “[s]tate collapse is a deeper phenomenon than mere rebellion, coup, or riot. It refers to a situation where the structure, authority (legitimate power), law, and political order have fallen apart and must be reconstituted in some form, old or new.” (1995, 1) He maintains that state collapse is not a sudden occurrence, resulting from a single event. Rather, he argues that state collapse “is a long-term degenerative disease” marking the culmination of a series of debilitating crises, each of which further erodes the power of the state to perform its key functions (1995, 8).

These key functions are identified by Ali Mazrui as follows:

First, sovereign control over territory; second, sovereign oversight and supervision (though not necessarily ownership) of the nation’s resources; third, effective and national revenue extraction from people, goods, and services; fourth, capacity to build and maintain an adequate national infrastructure (roads, postal services, telephone system, railways, and the like); fifth, capacity to render social services such as sanitation, education, housing, fire brigades, hospitals and clinics, and immunization facilities; and sixth, capacity for governance and maintenance of law and order. (1995, 11)

As the central government becomes increasingly weakened, these crucial state functions are no longer being performed and in turn pass into the hands of regional “warlords and gang leaders” in a process where power, such as it is, gravitates to the periphery (Zartman, 1995, 8; see also Gros, 1996; Rothberg, 2002).

Robert Rotberg tells us that there are degrees of state failure– from “weak” states, to “failed” states (which appear to be equated to “fragile” states), to “collapsed” states, the latter characterized as “an extreme version of a failed state.” (2002, 90) Rothberg claims that Somalia is the only state that had reached that terminal position, and he identifies Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Sudan as having satisfied “the criteria of state failure.” In the “weak state” category he places Chad, Colombia, Haiti, Kyrgyzstan, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Zimbabwe (2002, 92-93). Zartman offers two categories– those states in “serious” danger of collapse (Algeria, South Africa, Sudan, Cameroon, Madagascar, Malawi, Kenya, Djibouti, Nigeria, Niger, Togo, and Mail), and those in “maximum” danger of collapse (Angola, Mozambique, Rwanda, Burundi, Zaire (the DRC), Ethiopia, Chad, and Sierra Leone (1995, 3,11). If we combine states in all of the above categories we appear to be looking at about fifteen percent of the world’s nation-states, with about half of that percentage falling into in the “failed” state category.

The ten crises examined in *Humanitarian Crises and International Intervention* include all of the states mentioned on the Rotberg/Zartman lists except East Timor, which only emerged as an independent state in 2002, following the crisis-producing vote on independence from Indonesia in 1999. And given the need for a further international intervention there in 2006 and an attempted coup in 2008, there is little doubt that the new state of Timor Leste too meets the criteria of at least state failure, if not collapse.

### **A Shift to Intra-state Violence and “Wars of a Third Kind”**

Following World War II, the world saw an upsurge in anti-colonialism at the same time as the Cold War developed as the major framework for international politics. Especially during the 1960s the spread of the Cold War to areas of the world struggling for independence intruded on and intensified anti-colonial conflicts (for the impact of the Cold war on Africa, see Meredith, 2005). Paradoxically, however, this intrusion also forced a degree of restraint upon contending factions as the two Superpowers were able to exercise at least some influence over their chosen clients. In the early 1990s when the Cold War came to an end, constraints on former American and Soviet proxies were loosened or disappeared and an environment was created in which civil wars and other less organized forms of domestic political violence (“wars of a third kind”) could flourish. Writing in 1998, Jared Chopra identified 93 armed conflicts that had occurred since the Cold War’s end, and of the 5.5 million deaths for which these were responsible, 75 percent were civilian (1998, 1). It is precisely this kind of conflict that challenges the primacy of the state as a guarantor of security and contributes to its collapse. The situation is explained by Robert Streiter as follows:

The number of these small-scale but fierce conflicts escalated dramatically in the years after 1989. Relief agencies noted a nearly fivefold increase in emergencies to which they were called to give aid; almost all these were conflicts of human construction. The loosening of the bipolar grip on politics meant also that potential conflicts that had been

kept in check by the Great Powers could come to the surface. Problems left over from the European colonial period also began to boil over in Africa and South Asia. (2001, xi)

### **State Sovereignty vs. Human Rights**

In the early 1990s, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali placed an optimistic spin on the ability of the United Nations to deal with the new problem-filled situation confronting the post-colonial world:

With a new-found spirit of cooperation, the members of the Security Council have begun acting decisively in recent years to take on the unresolved problems of the past as well the emerging array of problems posed by a new era. And with new-found appeal, the international community has begun turning to the United Nations for help, not only in containing conflicts but also in resolving them - as well as preventing them in the first place. These factors, along with the outbreak of hostility in many areas around the world, have prompted the United Nations to respond with growing urgency, greater frequency and in more comprehensive form to today's crises. (1993, 66)

United Nations action in instances of domestic conflict was complicated, however, by the well-known "state sovereignty" clause of the Charter (Chapter I, Article 2, paragraph 7) which appears to severely restrict the ability of the organization to intervene in "matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state." (Fromuth, 1993, 344) The concept of state sovereignty, which has been evolving since the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, was defined by James Anderson as "the government's exclusive right to manage its internal affairs without external interference; and to conduct foreign affairs with other sovereign entities." (1992, 129) An obvious corollary to this was that " 'if national sovereignty is good, interference with a state's integrity must be bad.' " (Andrew Scott, as quoted in Anderson, 1992, 128)

At its base, sovereignty recognizes the legal equality of states, and in that role arguably it has been the strongest protector of the interests of less powerful states against those with greater military and economic capabilities. However, as the Cold War faded into history, *Human Rights*, especially their abuse by states, strongly challenged the absoluteness of the principle of *Sovereignty*. Christopher Greenwood posed the key question in the early 1990s:

Does it follow...that when a government massacres its own people, or when the people of a state are threatened with starvation or other disaster and the government of that state refuses international aid, the international community must remain an essentially passive spectator? Although the question is an old one, recent events suggest it is ripe for reconsideration. (1993, 34)

Five years later Jack Donnelly offered the answer that the old concept of state sovereignty no longer ruled unchallenged, arguing that "internationally recognized human rights have become very much like a 'standard of civilization,' " thus eroding the power of a state to do what it wishes to its population (1998, 1). Samuel Barkin went even further, arguing specifically that a "norm change" had taken place and that in the new reality, if a state fails to respect its citizens' human rights, it forfeits its claim to sovereignty, thus legitimizing international

intervention (1997, 29). By the beginning of the new century there was wide spread agreement that “a normative revolution” had indeed occurred. As Andrea Talentino stated it, “[t]he practice of intervention changed as a result and became part of conflict resolution approaches that, in extreme cases, required military force to end violence and provide support for reconstruction programs.” (2005, 276, also see Bell, 2000) This normative revolution was confirmed by the articulation of the “Responsibility to Protect” doctrine in 2001 and its adoption by the international community 2005 (see ICISS, 2001).

Indeed, during the decade of the 1990s, clear violations of human rights amounting to “humanitarian disasters” led to a number of cases of international intervention which either overrode or seriously infringed upon state sovereignty-- Liberia, Iraq, Bosnia, Somalia, Rwanda, and Kosovo ranking among the most noteworthy (Abiew, 1999, 16-17). These operations became identified with the term *humanitarian intervention*, usually defined as action to protect innocent persons from serious harm inflicted or allowed by their own governments (see Nardin 2006, 9). The United Nations has searched over a period of nearly two decades for a strategy or strategies to deal with a kaleidoscope of human inhumanity, but has encountered significant roadblocks along the way. The traditional concept of sovereignty may have been challenged, supplemented, or modified by the new imperative of human rights, but it has not been vanquished. To most states-- some more than others-- it is still a jealously guarded fundamental, and hence what Chopra and Weiss (1992) referred to as the “human rights-sovereignty deadlock” can resurface at almost any time to place severe restrictions on what may be attempted in the name of the international community.

As might be expected, human rights abuses have increasingly occurred in states that are “fragile” or “failing” rather than those ruled by relatively strong central administrations which are more likely to be susceptible to diplomatic pressure. This situation makes humanitarian intervention responses both more necessary and more difficult (Shattuck, 1966, 169). Of course having to deal with a variety of “war lords” in a highly amorphous conflict situation means that there is a greater likelihood of disagreement among UN members as to the appropriate response, and a greater reluctance to commit human or even material resources to the task.

We shall now review each of the five independent variables examined in the determinants of intervention study with respect to their impact on intervention as a response to humanitarian crises of a magnitude likely to contribute to state collapse.

### **Strength of International Response:**

[Table 1 about here]

Table 1 indicates the rank order of our “strength of international response to crises” variable. The range of the response was from the robust intervention in Somalia (1992-93) to the almost total lack of interest, save for humanitarian relief efforts, in Sudan during the same time period.

### **Determinants of International Intervention**

#### **1. Crisis Severity**

The “severity of crisis” rank order, shown in Table 2, is based on a combination of the number of deaths (short-term and long-term), the number of refugees (short-term and long-term), and the actuality or likelihood of cross-border “spill-over.” First, it must be pointed out that the

“statistics” dealing with these particular “deadly quarrels,” to use the language of Lewis F. Richardson and Quincy Wright (1960), are far from exact.<sup>1</sup> That said, the overall range with respect to numbers of deaths, refugees, and cross-border “spill-over” is certainly great enough to enable us to make reasonable estimates as to relative crisis severity, with Rwanda and Haiti occupying the polar positions.

**[Table 2 about here]**

The Spearman Rank Order Correlation between “crisis severity” and “strength of international response” is -0.18, indicating at best a weak negative relationship between the rank orders on the two variables.<sup>2</sup> Quite clearly the crises in Haiti and East Timor, where comparatively few people were killed in the period leading up to relatively strong intervention responses, contributed in a major way to this negative correlation. If we remove these two cases from the calculation (leaving an all-African sample of eight crises), the correlation coefficient increases to +0.14, this time indicating a rather weak positive correlation between perceived severity of crises on the African continent and the strength of the international response to them. Our conclusion is therefore, that by itself crisis severity does not appear to be a particularly good predictor of international crisis intervention.

## **2. Perceived Risk**

With the exception of Liberia and Sudan, all cases involving humanitarian intervention in the 1990s were viewed by the media (and seemingly by decision-makers as well) through the lens of the Somalia operation, which by all accounts was a total failure despite widespread initial optimism and considerable resources applied to it by the international community. How appropriate, we may ask, were the “lessons learned” from the Somalia experience?

Somalia involved the extreme application of the circumstances identified with state failure or collapse, while at least five other countries in our study (Liberia, Sierra Leone, Zaire, Burundi, and Angola) were somewhere on the path between failure and collapse. Four of the ten case studies, however, involved states whose governments were largely the source of the problem— and they were powerful enough, to use a euphemism, to “behave badly.” Indeed, in the case of Rwanda, the state was strong enough to have orchestrated a genocide that exceeded Nazi Germany’s record of killing a large number of people in a brief period of time (Hatzfeld, 2005). In different ways, Sudan, Haiti, and Indonesia (through its actions in East Timor) present similar examples of state power run amok.

The Haitian and Indonesian governments’ role in the violence in Haiti and East Timor respectively present the clearest application of this last scenario. Indeed, the fact that both the interventions into Haiti and East Timor were in the final analysis “negotiated” with the governments in power, meant that there was minimal conflict and loss of life on the part of either the intervening force or the citizenry at large. Of course critics complained in both cases that action should have been taken much sooner and more definitively, but the Somalia experience had demonstrated the value of caution in such matters, and in one way or another significantly influenced calculations of risk in all subsequent crises, whether state collapse or state-perpetrated violence was the precipitating cause.

These distinctions regarding the role of governments in humanitarian crises tended not to be made clear in media reporting, leading in some cases to the risks involved in intervention being overestimated, while in others they was underestimated. A further problem is that those

who supported an intervention tended to minimize the risks involved, while those opposed tended to exaggerate them. This is most apparent in the debate in the United States over the Haitian intervention. In short, perceptions of risk depend a great deal on who is doing the perceiving and from which vantage point the observation is made. Risk, therefore, is not a factor which can be estimated with any precision, but it is undeniably important whenever the possibility of military operations to control violence is considered. And, following Somalia in 1993, it became more important than ever as the natural tendency to sympathize with and wish to assist people in dire situations began to be weighed more carefully than ever against costs (especially personnel costs) and the recognition that “success” (however that might be defined) was far from a sure thing.

### **3. National Interest**

Even in the clearest of circumstances, what is truly in the “national interest” of a nation-state is never a foregone conclusion. Rather, national interest is a contentious issue, usually open to a number of interpretations and the subject of vigorous debate among powerful domestic interest groups. This was most clearly evident in the case of Haiti, which was seen by supporters of an intervention as “vital” to American interests, and by its opponents as “marginal” to those interests. Notably, every crisis studied affected the national interests of some other country, particularly any country that shared a boundary with the crisis-afflicted state, or one that was close enough to be affected by an outflow of refugees. Table 3 attempts to categorize the level of post-Cold War conventional national interests of possible intervening powers in humanitarian crisis-affected states.

#### **[Table 3 about here]**

As previously mentioned, the end of the Cold War brought about significant changes in the nature and perception of national interest. Not only were areas previously considered to be of strategic importance now a great deal more marginal in the calculations of the Great Powers, the ethos respecting the role of national interest in international interventions changed as well. Andreas Talentino states the latter case convincingly:

The practice of intervention changed ... and became part of conflict resolution approaches that, in extreme cases, required military force to end violence and provide support for reconstruction programs.... Taken all together, these changes reflected a normative revolution that seemed to raise principle above power and redefine legitimacy in the context of responsibility.... [Intervention moved]...away from its traditional uses; rather than primarily benefiting the intervenor, operations were intended to benefit the target. (2005, 276-277)

The adoption of the “Responsibility to Protect” doctrine in 2005 confirms Talentino’s observations. It should not be supposed, however, that national interests have ceased to be a strong motivating force when issues of intervention, particularly military intervention, arise. It is clear, in fact, that during the 1990s at least, intervention based solely or even primarily on humanitarian impulses was a decidedly unattractive option for states capable of mounting such operations. Of our ten case studies during that decade, only Somalia and Zaire appear to have been instances in which intervention decisions were decided on moral rather than traditional

economic or strategic grounds. Many others were of course couched in high moral rhetoric, but closer examination reveals underlying material interests in play as well. We argue, for example, that this was the case with both the U.S.-led intervention in Haiti in 1994 and the Australian-led intervention in East Timor in 1999. Moreover, while France belatedly intervened unilaterally in Rwanda (albeit with UN approval), and strongly urged the international community to do so in Zaire, claiming high moral ground in each case, most observers consider that its primary motivation was a combination of concern to thwart perceived threats to French language, culture, and national honour, and a desire to protect former client regimes. A reasonable case can thus be made that involvement of “traditional” national interests continued to be important (if not crucial) if Western states were to lead or even commit troops to most post-Somalia peace-enforcement missions.

United States behaviour with respect to the Liberian civil war also seems to confirm this. Virtually all scholars agree that once the Cold War was over, Africa was not high on the U.S. foreign policy agenda. However, one might have expected that Liberia would be an exception, given the existence of long-standing (if never particularly close) historical ties, the presence of extensive U.S. communications infrastructure in the country, a request from the Liberian government for U.S. assistance, an intervention capability conveniently at hand, and wide-spread international expectations that Washington would act. Yet no action was forthcoming, nor is there any evidence that it was even seriously considered. Clearly more direct and tangible national interests would have been necessary to influence decision-makers in the opposite direction.

Former European colonial powers took much the same stance as far as Africa was concerned (see Rouvez, 1994 and Massey, 2000). Britain was largely out of the picture, retaining no particular presence where it had once been lord and master, and apparently content to follow where Washington led. Belgium was still involved, but only to a limited extent, and was not in a position to act unilaterally in any case. France retained the closest ties to its former colonies, but having been somewhat embarrassed by its venture into Rwanda (“Operation Turquoise”), it too found insufficient reason to do more than try to persuade others to take up what it claimed were their international obligations.

African states themselves had the greatest interest in controlling political and social violence on their continent for two reasons: in general to demonstrate to Western nations their capacity to cope with their own affairs, and in particular to avoid problems associated with large numbers, sometimes millions, of refugees that were inevitably produced by turmoil in areas in which the same ethnic groups occupied living space in two, or sometimes several, adjoining countries.

Unfortunately, those with the greatest interest in responding to a crisis also usually had the fewest resources with which to do so. ECOWAS, led by regional hegemon Nigeria, did undertake interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone, but the participants, especially Nigeria, each appear to have had their own individual and particular reasons for joining the venture. Such reasons were frequently contradictory and at best not helpful to the objective of engineering an end to the ongoing conflicts (see Howe, 1996/97). Efforts on the part of Central African states to organize interventions in Burundi and Zaire in 1996 did not come to fruition, at least partly due to the lack of resources. We conclude, therefore, that while African states may have a stronger “natural” incentive to intervene in humanitarian crises occurring on their continent, they do not



differ significantly from states in other parts of the world in being motivated first and foremost by egocentric perceptions of their own national interest.

The reality is that while the “Responsibility to Protect” is a new or enhanced factor to be considered in intervention decision-making, it is as yet no more than that. Decisions to come to the rescue of people far from home continue to depend on whether doing so is important in some sense other than conscience alone. Thus traditional concepts of national interest appear not to have been superseded in any fundamental way, and are unlikely to be in the foreseeable future.

#### **4. Media “Alerting”**

Data on the media “alerting” variable, as shown in Table 4, are quite precise and again the range is considerable. In that Haiti is located in the Western Hemisphere and with over 20,000 U.S. troops scheduled to spear-head a long-discussed and controversial invasion, it is not surprising that Haiti stands by itself in terms of media interest. In addition to Haiti, we find that crises in Somalia and Rwanda both exceeded 200 items of content over a six month period, while those in East Timor, Liberia and Zaire all exceeded well over 100 items. We have concluded that for these six crises the volume of media attention was sufficient to have “alerted” the American population to an on-going serious situation. Contrariwise, we believe that crises in Sudan, Burundi, Sierra Leone, and Angola all failed to capture sufficient media attention for a so-called “media push” to have even begun to be a factor, either positive or negative, in intervention decision-making.

#### **[Table 4 about here]**

If we look at the Spearman Rank Order Correlation between the “volume of media coverage” on the one hand and the “strength of the international response” on the other, we find a correlation coefficient of +0.79, that would appear to suggest a consistent, relatively broad-based media influence over decision-making leading to interventions (for the all-Africa sample this correlation remains basically unchanged at +0.81). Significantly, crisis severity failed to predict volume of media coverage much better than it did the international response to them (-0.04 vs. -0.18).

However, in spite of these rather impressive correlations, one must remember the long-standing caveat not to confuse correlation with causality. In fact, in our estimation, there are at best six cases where media coverage was sufficient to even suggest that a “CNN effect” might have been a factor in intervention decision-making: in chronological order these are Liberia, Somalia, Rwanda, Haiti, Zaire, and East Timor. In order to probe further whether media coverage was in fact “pushing” decision-makers toward intervention, as argued by proponents of the “CNN effect,” we will present case by case summaries of coverage of these crises in *The New York Times* in order to assess how possible international intervention responses were in fact evaluated and presented to readers.

#### **5. Media “Evaluation”**

**Liberia:** In spite of close historical ties and what might be seen as at least adequate alerting on the part of mass media to the horrors that were occurring in Liberia, a U.S.-led humanitarian intervention was never an issue that was discussed in media coverage of that crisis. U.S. policy was firmly committed to non-intervention and *The New York Times* offered no

criticism of this policy, which remained unchanged for the duration of that nation's long and costly civil war.

**Somalia:** On the eve of the landing of U.S. intervention forces in Somalia in December 1992, Walter Goodman presented a textbook case for the CNN effect:

it was television's wrenching pictures from Somalia that goaded a reluctant Administration to act.... once the pictures appeared of fly-tormented faces and bloated bellies of dying babies, the effect was stunning. The natural reaction of Americana against the gun-happy druggies who were stealing their food, became too much for Washington to resist. (1992, Dec. 8, C20)

Certainly the volume of media coverage of the Somalia crisis, second only to that on Haiti, is more than sufficient to have alerted the American population to the seriousness of the situation there. Likewise, our analysis of evaluative coverage in *The New York Times*, while not establishing one, is certainly consistent with a media "push" toward intervention— first, over the summer in getting the U.S. to fly in food supplies, and later in the fall to get it to commit its troops to protect that food from predatory warlords and roving gangs. Moreover, prior to the sustained media attention given to Somalia over the summer and fall of 1992, U.S. policy was one of non-intervention. In that this policy then changed in directions suggested by *New York Times* editorials, in our opinion supports the conclusion of a relatively strong media impact contributing to two decisions to intervene.

**Rwanda:** Following the disastrous 1993 experience of intervention in Somalia, the Rwandan genocide in the spring and summer of 1994 was the first major crisis to command the attention of the international community in terms of "needing to do something" – and, needing to do it quickly (see Thompson, 2007). Mass media in the United States clearly alerted the population to the crisis, although in fairness it is doubtful whether anyone could grasp the full extent and pace of the horror that was occurring there. However, in terms of an evaluation of an international intervention response to the genocide, *The New York Times* seemed as much in the grip of the "Somalia Syndrome" as was the Clinton administration; the latter did not want a U.S. intervention, and the former did nothing in the way of creating a media push to change that policy. At best what we have in Rwanda is a case where media evaluation reinforced a policy that was decidedly "cool" towards an intervention in the first place. However, in that there was no change in U.S. policy, it is difficult to calculate whether media evaluation had any effect on decisions made to avoid taking any action in spite of the truly horrific level of organized killing occurring there.

**Haiti:** Haiti presents the only case where the U.S. government actively considered a policy of military intervention relatively early on in the crisis study period, albeit as a "last resort." Partly due to fears of "another Somalia," and perhaps more importantly due to a dislike of exiled Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, important political elites (some Democrats as well as Republicans) opposed any U.S. intervention to restore him. As a result, over the summer of 1994 the Clinton administration consciously used mass media as an instrument to bring the American people "on-side" for an intervention and hopefully to neutralize opposition in Congress (Minear, et al., 1996, 60-61).

The American public certainly was well aware of the repression in Haiti carried out by the military government and the resulting out-flow of refugees to the United States that had been set in motion by the September 1991 coup d'état that overthrew Haiti's elected President. Beyond that events in Haiti had been covered extensively in the intervening years, especially the ignominious retreat of the *Harlan County* from Port-au-Prince in the fall of 1993. However, what we see in the case of Haiti is evidence of the failure of the "CNN effect," as in spite of providing massive coverage of the crisis, *The New York Times* clearly did not buy into the wisdom of committing U.S. troops to restore President Aristide, and it made this position clear in editorial after editorial. Over the summer of 1994 neither elite nor popular opposition to an intervention (not to mention media opposition), had any apparent impact on U.S. policy, except perhaps to reinforce Clinton's often-stated preference for a negotiated departure of the generals over their forceful removal— a policy, which on the eve of an invasion, after three years of trying, finally proved successful in late September 1994.

**Zaire:** The refugee crisis in eastern Zaire was the direct result of the Rwandan genocide in 1994, and the failure of the international community to make any serious attempt to limit that horrific event was the cause of widespread feelings of guilt. In that the same Hutu-Tutsi antagonisms that had led to the 1994 genocide were again present, the crisis in Zaire had to be treated as significant; however, the option of intervention to deal with it was approached very cautiously indeed.

There seems little doubt that initially the Clinton administration did not favour U.S. participation in an intervention, and its support for an UN-led intervention appeared half-hearted as well. However, as time passed, especially when the crisis exploded in October 1996 with the expulsion of ethnic Tutsis living in Zaire and increasing Rwandan military involvement, the U.S. administration did change its policy to the point of agreeing to commit troops to limited, but significant potential ground combat roles.

We must bear in mind, however, that both the mandate and mission duration of "Operation Assurance" were quite limited; in particular, the former was restricted to providing "safe corridors" for the movement of refugees back to Rwanda and significantly did not include separating Hutu militia and former Rwandan army troops from the general refugee population or disarming the refugee population. At most, *The New York Times* supported such a limited role for the United States in Zaire. However, the change in the U.S. position on an intervention appears to have been prompted more by international pressure— mainly from France and Canada— than from media-generated public pressure (see Erlanger, 1996, Nov. 18). Further, as soon as circumstances permitted (i.e., the "voluntary" return of huge numbers of refugees to Rwanda) the United States quickly backed away from an intervention that ultimately never took place.

**East Timor:** Following Somalia and Zaire, East Timor appears to be the only other plausible case for media impact on a decision to mount an international intervention— and in this case the chief focus was on Australian decision-making. Coral Bell (2000) argues that the previously discussed "norm change" that had undermined the sanctity of state sovereignty, combined with intense media pressure on decision-makers, is fundamental to understanding the Australian change in policy toward Indonesia, which, she points out with respect to East Timor, had up to September 1999 followed a classic *real-politik* script. However, there were important Australian economic and security interests involved in East Timor (oil and refugees), and, in the final analysis, it is important to understand that no action was taken by Australia, the UN, or any

other country until the Indonesian government had accepted (albeit with much arm twisting, to which mass media no doubt contributed), the deployment of an intervention force.

The United States approached the crisis in East Timor most cautiously, relying on the promises by the Indonesian government and military to maintain order long after it was clear that not only was security not being provided, but that the Indonesian security forces were either condoning or actually participating in the violence. While the Clinton administration did continue to press Indonesia to allow a force of international peace-keepers into East Timor, it also appeared extremely reluctant to support any deployment of international troops without the prior approval of Indonesia, which after literally weeks of uncontrolled violence carried out by pro-Indonesian militias, was finally achieved prior to the deployment of INTERFET.

### **Summary- The Experience of the 1990s**

Following the sobering experience of Somalia, U.S. media (specifically the liberal-tending *New York Times*), followed a decidedly cautious line with respect to advocating international intervention. The risks inherent in intervention were too obvious to ignore, even in the face of documented human suffering. Only in the cases of Zaire and East Timor, where the on-going violence was acute, did the paper endorse an international intervention, and in both of these cases the endorsement was premised on limited mandates and short durations for the proposed missions. For *The New York Times* the problems of Rwanda appeared beyond the help that any intervention might deliver, while an intervention to restore Haiti's elected President to power was opposed most strongly on a number of grounds.

With these caveats in mind, our findings for the ten crisis cases examined, while failing to support a blanket "CNN effect" on intervention decision-making, do indicate that in the overall mix of factors leading to an intervention *the international community is more likely to respond to a serious crisis in a country of marginal strategic or economic importance if the mainstream media are effective in "alerting" the population to the crisis.* It is important here to reiterate that for the entire sample, the perceived severity of the crisis predicted neither the level of international response nor the level of media interest. What did predict the strength of the international response was the volume of media coverage— i.e., the "alerting function" associated with the CNN effect as the rank order correlation for the entire sample was +0.79 , while for the all African sample it was +0.81.

However, as we pointed out, a second factor that must be considered is whether what was deemed to be an adequate "media alert" (present in only six of the ten cases) was accompanied by evaluations of the situation that presented a convincing case for a "moral obligation" to intervene, as well as an assessment that an intervention could actually make a difference in alleviating conditions of extreme distress in vulnerable populations. In discussing this point, as Robert Entman has argued, it is significant that "[t]he public's actual opinions arise from framed information, from selected highlights of events, issues, and problems, rather than from direct contact with the realities of foreign affairs." (2004, 123) While the "pictures speak louder than words" argument may hold some sway, given the key role of the "attentive public" in public opinion formation (see Almond, 1950; Devine, 1970), it is doubtful whether pictorial coverage itself, in the presence of sustained argumentation against an international intervention, would be sufficient to mobilize a population to the extent that decision-makers would be forced into action they otherwise would not have taken.

Thus we have seen that the confluence of conditions needed to create a “CNN effect” did not occur very often in the violence-filled decade of the 1990s; the most compelling case was that of Somalia, with an equally strong disconfirming case presented by Haiti. In Zaire and East Timor arguments for a “CNN effect are plausible, but in our opinion less than conclusive. Overall, a “media push” toward intervention is certainly inconclusive in instances where a well defined conventional national interest was not also present.

In short, our evidence from the decade prior to 9/11 tells us that in the absence of clearly defined and articulated conventional national interests, there was no rush on the part of the international community to come to the rescue of threatened populations based simply on moral imperatives. Writing in the context of the intervention in East Timor, University of Southern California Professor Ronald Steel presents a strong case for the persistence of “national interest” (conventionally defined), as continuing to determine which humanitarian crises would elicit an international response. He characterizes “humanitarian intervention... as the exception rather than the rule” and argues that although regrettable, “[i]ntervention will occur where it can be done relatively cheaply, against a weak nation, in an area both accessible and strategic, where the public’s emotions are aroused, and *where it will not get in the way of other political, economic or military needs.*” (1999, Sept. 12, IV19, italics added) On the basis of our evidence from the 1990s is hard to disagree with Professor Steel’s assessment.

### **The Impact of 9/11**

Just as Peter Jakobsen (1996) has pointed out that the end of the Cold War changed the character of international intervention, Andrea Talentino, among many, noted that September 11, 2001 marked yet another “system transforming moment.” Thus, in addressing the policy focus of this workshop, we will comment briefly on the possible impact of that event on future international intervention in situations of state failure or those likely to contribute to that end.

In our view 9/11 created both “push” and “pull” factors regarding possible responses to humanitarian crises, and it is far from easy to assess the relative weight of the two. On the “push” side of the ledger (leading to the greater likelihood of intervention) it should be noted that the concept of “national interest” has again changed. In light of Afghanistan’s role in sheltering Osama bin Laden’s al-Qaeda prior to 9/11, new attention has been focussed on the consequences of state failure and the chaos involved in battling “war lords” that tends to follow. There is now a greater awareness that humanitarian crises in the post-colonial world have the potential to cause state collapse, and that the consequent power vacuums will inevitably become fertile ground for terrorist organizations. At the same time, doctrines like the “Responsibility to Protect” provide increased legitimacy for humanitarian interventions. And, unfortunately, there is no shortage of actual and potential trouble spots. Taking only those crises examined in our study, there are still severe problems in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Timor Leste, Somalia, Haiti, and Sudan which continue to challenge the international community.

On the other hand, the two major military interventions attempted since 9/11 have been less than spectacularly successful, and certainly have given little encouragement to those who might think that raggle-taggle war lords or hit-and run-guerrillas are easily dealt with. The ongoing NATO-led peace stabilization/state-building mission in Afghanistan that followed the U.S.-led military defeat of the Taliban is meeting with at best uncertain results in dealing with an entrenched insurgency (see Independent Panel, 2008), while the U.S.-led invasion and

occupation of Iraq (in part justified by George W. Bush on issues related to 9/11, but less clearly linked to that event), can at this time only be described as a disaster in terms of American lives lost, the American economy, and American standing in the world. While it might be argued that both (Iraq in particular), are quite different from what is usually meant by humanitarian interventions, the point is that they are not likely to increase enthusiasm for military involvement of any kind anywhere unless there is an immediate and tangible threat to national security that is obvious to the government and the public alike. Media organizations or politicians of any stripe attempting to mobilize popular support for new intervention missions in the current environment will have a very hard sell, to say the least. Thus the sobering experiences of Afghanistan and Iraq, Osama bin-Laden's call to his followers to oppose any UN peacekeeping force in Darfur on the grounds of defending " 'Islam, its land and its people,' " (as quoted in Slackman, 2006, Apr. 24, A8), not to mention memories of the failure on the part of the international intervention in Somalia in the early 1990s, point to extreme caution on the part of Western states in becoming involved militarily in humanitarian crises in cultures that they do not fully understand.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the UN endorsement of the ICISS "Responsibility to Protect" report in 2005, it is possible to argue the 9/11 not only elevated "terrorism" over international "moral obligation" in the eyes of American, and to a lesser extent, other Western foreign policy decision-makers, but created as well a divide within the international community, since terrorism is something aimed primarily at the Western world and others can be less concerned about it. Further, it might be suggested that for the foreseeable future, the United States in particular, but also the West in more general terms, might be expected to be largely preoccupied with real and imagined terrorisms (somewhat like a new "communist menace") and have little tolerance for unconnected humanitarian adventures, while the rest of the world flounders out of lack of capacity or will to do otherwise without Western (U.S.) leadership.

But reality in fact does not so far appear to be corresponding to this line of reasoning. Since 9/11, and even since the Iraq quagmire, efforts of one kind or another have been made to deal with a number of serious humanitarian situations, most of them with at least the indirect involvement of the United States. For instance political violence erupted in Haiti in early 2004 when disgruntled former members of the Haitian army (disbanded by President Jean-Bertrand Aristide following his return to power in 1994), began an insurgency against him. Aristide called for international assistance, but none was forthcoming until after the president had "resigned," the state had collapsed, and chaos ruled the land.<sup>4</sup> The situation was such that Robert Pastor called Haiti " 'an absolutely failed state— no institutions, no rule of law, no spirit of compromise, no security.' " (as quoted in Polgreen and Weiner, 2004, Mar. 3, A6) It was only at the point of state collapse, however, that United States, France, and Canada sent troops to reestablish order. They, in turn, were followed by a UN peacekeeping force of about 11,000 and an election in early 2006. It was not until the summer of 2007 that progress was finally reported in gaining control over the violence-plagued slums of Port-au-Prince. New unrest was reported in April 2008 due to a significant increase in the price of rice, that included demands that President Rene Préal, elected in 2006, step down (Doyle, 2008, Apr. 10).<sup>5</sup>

In the spring of 2006 a crisis developed in the new country of Timor Leste. It was rooted in a conflict within the army between former guerrilla fighters and those who had been less involved in the resistance to former Indonesian occupation. The conflict resulted in the dismissal of some 600 soldiers— nearly half the army. In early May, continued clashes between dismissed

soldiers and police, as well as gang-related violence, resulted in “tens of thousands” fleeing the violence in Dili, the capital city, (BBC News, 2006, May 5). In an effort to bring the violence under control, then Foreign Minister Ramos-Horta called for international assistance, and Australia, Portugal, and Malaysia responded promptly with a small intervention force of about 1,300 troops. With the situation calmed, in August 2006 the UN responded with its own new mission focused on “stability, national reconciliation, and democratic governance for Timor Leste.” (UN, 2007, Jan. 4) An attempted coup in February 2008 resulted in the critical wounding of now Prime Minister Ramos-Horta and a further dispatch of Australian troops to support those that had remained in East Timor following the 2006 violence.

On the African continent, the renewed chaos in Somalia linked to al-Qaeda, and the violence in Darfur stemming from regional marginalization leading to a rebellion, followed by a brutal government counter-insurgency campaign conducted largely by *Janjaweed* militias, have elicited different responses from the international community. With respect to Somalia, in the fall of 2006 the United States attempted to get the United Nations to organize a regional peacekeeping force to support the interim Somali government in what was described as “a struggle for control... [against]... its powerful Islamist foes.” (Hoge, 2006, Dec. 2, A7; see also McGregor, 2006) When this initiative failed, in early 2007 an Ethiopian military intervention on behalf of the Somali government was at least tacitly supported by the United States. As well, the U.S. launched a series of air strikes against suspected al-Qaeda fighters (Gordon and Mazzetti, 2007, Apr. 8). We speculate that the Somalia response may provide the template for “proxy” type interventions characteristic of the Cold War era, particularly on the African continent where Western interests are not extensive.

The crisis in the Darfur region of Sudan appears to have followed the 1999 East Timor scenario— i.e., attempting to secure acceptance of the host government to an international intervention force (see Sidahmed, et al., 2008). While in East Timor this process involved less than a month (sufficient time, however, for much of the colony’s infrastructure to be destroyed by rampaging militias), in Darfur the process has lasted over five years, during which an estimated 280,000 to 320,000 people have died; refugees are estimated in the range of 2½ million, with aid agencies engaged in “supplying essential services to 4.2 million people;” (Goodspeed, 2007, July 17, A13) and a major “spill-over” of the conflict into neighbouring Chad and the Central African Republic.

It was only in mid-April of 2007, after four years of conflict, that the Sudanese government reluctantly agreed to accept a UN force to complement an African Union peacekeeping force on the ground in Darfur.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, the delay in responding to the crisis has had negative consequences as the *Janjaweed* militias, widely reported earlier to have been under the influence, if not the command, of the Sudanese government (as of early September 2007) were reported to be “unleashing their considerable firepower against each other, in a battle over the spoils of war that is killing hundreds of people and displacing tens of thousands.” (Gettleman, 2007, Sept. 3, A8) According to *New York Times* reporter Jeffrey Gettleman, “[s]ome aid workers say Darfur is beginning to resemble Somalia, the world’s longest-running AK-47-fed chaos.” (2007, Sept. 3, A8) This of course would make the mission of any UN peacekeeping force sent to Darfur, even now with the concurrence of the Sudanese government, far more difficult, if not impossible.<sup>7</sup>

It would appear, then, that 9/11 has not changed all that much. Interventions of varying types do in fact continue to occur, if too cautiously and too slow for some. Arguably the “intervention dilemma” identified by Barry Blechman in the mid-1990s (the clear need to intervene vs. the high costs involved in doing so) has become clearer in the minds of decision-makers: the risks of failing to intervene, at least where state collapse may be immanent appear to be greater, while the costs of wading into hostile environments have increased as well. The “Responsibility to Protect” may be the accepted creed of the international community, (see Axworthy and Rock, 2008, Jan. 29) but creeds take time to be translated into practice, and it seems to us unlikely that it will quickly come to be the deciding criteria when issues of rescuing populations at risk arise. Rather, interventions (at least extensive military, peace-enforcement type interventions) will be in response to prevailing concepts of the national interest, and 9/11 has not altered that fundamental fact, though it appears to have given the concept of national interest a new and historically unique colouration.

## Notes

\*Material in the section of the paper dealing with the crises of the 1990s summarizes the major findings of Walter C. Soderlund and E. Donald Briggs, *Humanitarian Crises and International Intervention: Reassessing the Impact of Mass Media* scheduled for publication by Kumarian Press in the fall of 2008. My co-author contributed significantly to the second section of the paper as well.

1. In some cases estimates of the number of deaths and refugees caused by these crises differed by many hundreds of thousands. Given the length of time over which some crises persisted, the disorganized nature of most, combined with widespread societal poverty, famine, targeting of civilians, questionable census figures, and government censorship, this is understandable. In the absence of hard numbers, adding to the confusion is the tendency for humanitarian groups to promote an international intervention by “overstating” to some extent, the degree of suffering on the ground. This is also seen as aiding in raising funds for relief efforts. Lindsey Hilsum offers a penetrating discussion of “fact inflation” as practiced by NGOs (see 2007, 183-184).

To some extent this complicated the construction of our rank order of crisis severity. However, in that we are dealing with ordinal rather than interval data, we believe we have created a sufficiently accurate ordering based on how each crisis was likely to have been perceived at the time decisions were being made regarding a possible intervention. When in doubt, we gave preference to those crises that appeared most acute in nature, thus likely to lead to large scale loss of life in a relatively brief period of time. While admittedly somewhat subjective, and not wishing to imply that any crisis was not serious, we believe this process has produced a reasonable picture of crisis severity, as seen by those making decisions.

2. The Spearman rank order correlation coefficient is a statistical measure appropriate for use with ordinal data and shows the degree to which two sets of ordinal rankings are similar. The measure varies from +1.0 when the two rank orders are in perfect agreement to -1.0 when they are in perfect disagreement. Scores around zero indicate that there is no relationship between the two rank orders (see Blalock, 1972, 416-417).



3. In the spring of 2007, *New York Times* Op-Ed columnist and strong advocate of international intervention in Darfur, Nicholas D. Kristof, acknowledged that “aggressive military measures” in violation of Sudanese claims of sovereignty “would be counterproductive.” He advocated instead a campaign of pressure on all parties to come to a peace agreement (2007, Mar. 13, A19) The argument is similar to the “hue and cry” option described by Coral Bell in her analysis of Australian policy towards Indonesia in the East Timor crisis (2000).

4. From the time of his first election in 1990, Jean-Bertrand Aristide had never been the favourite of conservative elements in the United States and there is speculation that the Bush administration covertly supported the insurgency against him in 2004 (see Engler and Fenton, 2006). While this may overstate the case, there seems little doubt the Bush administration was advising the political opponents of Aristide, making a compromise with him more difficult to achieve (see Bogdanish and Nordberg, 2006, Jan. 29). At any rate it is hard to escape the conclusion that the American president abandoned Aristide (and democratic government in Haiti) at a time of need (see Soderlund, 2006).

5. It was reported that prices of basic staples such as rice and beans in Haiti had risen by 50 percent. Similar protests were noted in Egypt, Indonesia, Ivory Coast, Mauritania, Mozambique, Senegal, Burkina Faso, and Cameroon (see Doyle, 2008, Apr 10) While at present it is impossible to forecast the ultimate impact of the food crisis, it should be noted that the unrest created by increases in the price of basic foodstuffs played a role in the process leading to state failure in Angola and Liberia.

6. Both Afghanistan and Darfur are cases where the UN effectively “out-sourced” intervention to NATO under provisions of Chapter VIII. Depending on the ultimate success of these operations (by no means certain), given NATO’s greater military resources and more effective command structure (at least when compared to that evidenced by the UN), this sort of out-sourcing may compete with the type of “proxy” force that appeared in Somalia in 2007 as the preferred western solution to post-9/11 intervention dilemmas.

7. The UN formally took control of peacekeeping in Darfur from the African Union at the beginning of January 2008. However, at the beginning of February, the UN force which was mustering in neighbouring Chad, was not deployed due to the “spill-over” of violence from Darfur which threatened to overthrow the government of President Idriss Déby (Maliti, 2008, Feb. 5).

A study of the Darfur crisis focused on media coverage and international intervention is being conducted by University of Windsor Professors Abdel Salam Sidahmed, Mohamed Hassan Mohamed, E. Donald Briggs and Walter C. Soderlund. The book, which we hope to have completed by the end of the year, is tentatively titled *The Humanitarian Crisis in Darfur: Media Framing and International Intervention*.

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**Table 1**  
**Rank Order-**  
**Strength of International Response to Crisis**

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Crisis</u>	<u>International Response</u>
1	Somalia	UNOSOM I; UNITAF (United States); UNOSOM II
2	Haiti	“Operation Restore (Uphold) Democracy” (United States)
3	Liberia	ECOMOG I “Operation Liberty” (Nigeria)
4	Sierra Leone	ECOMOG II (Nigeria)
5	East Timor	INTERFET (Australia)
6	Rwanda	UNAMIR I; “Operation Turquoise” (France); UNAMIR II
7	Zaire*	
8	Burundi**	
9	Angola***	
10	Sudan****	

\* A UN intervention “Operation Assurance” was to be composed of 10,000 to 15,000 troops. To be led by Canada, it was authorized and organized in the fall of 1996, but never deployed.

\*\*Interventions to be undertaken by African states as well as by the UN were proposed in the summer of 1996, but were never organized; a UN mission was finally deployed, but not until 2004.

\*\*\*Thirty civilian observers were sent by the UN to Angola in November 1999.

\*\*\*\* Beyond on-going relief operations, no intervention took place in southern Sudan in 1992. A peace-keeping force was sent to Southern Sudan, following the signing of a peace agreement in 2005.

**Table 2**  
**Rank Orders:**  
**Overall Severity of Crisis/International Response**

<u>Rank on Sev. of Crisis</u>	<u>Crisis</u>	<u>Rank on Int. Response</u>
1	Rwanda	6
2	Somalia	1
3	Sudan	10
4	Burundi	8
5	Zaire	7
6	Liberia	3
7	Sierra Leone	4
8	Angola	9
9	East Timor	5
10	Haiti	2

**Table 3**  
**Category of Crises,**  
**Based on Perceived “National Interest” \***

<b>high</b>	Liberia (Nigeria) Haiti (U.S.) East Timor (Australia) Sierra Leone (Nigeria)
<b>medium</b>	Rwanda (France) Burundi (France) Zaire (France)
<b>low</b>	Somalia (U.S.) Angola (U.S.)



unclear      Sudan

**\*crises are listed chronologically, within category**

**Table 4**

**Rank Order of Crises:**

**Strength of Media Alert\*/ Strength of International Response**

<u>Rank on Media Alert</u>			<u>Strength of Int. Response</u>
1	Haiti	(N=582)	2
2	Somalia	(N=270)	1
3	Rwanda	(N=242)	6
4	East Timor	(N=165)	5
5	Liberia	(N=132)	3
6	Zaire	(N=120)	7
7	Burundi	(N=45)	8
8	Sierra Leone	(N=25)	4
9	Angola	(N=15)	9
10	Sudan	(N=13)	10

**\* number of stories appearing in four mainstream U.S. mover media over a six month period either prior to an international intervention or a clear indication that none was forthcoming.**

[May 2, 2008]